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ABSTRACT

A national survey investigated the extent and design of programs in which content instruction is combined with instruction in English as a Second Language (content-ESL). Findings are summarized here. Is was found that about 15 percent of all public schools, and all states, have such programs, with heaviest concentration in the south and southwest United States. Most are offered in early elementary grades, and most serve Spanish-speakers. Almost half use students' native languages in the classroom. Most participating students are from low-income families. Social studies, science, and math are the most common subject areas, but overall, over 100 subject matter types are taught. A large percentage use curricula and materials designed especially for them, teacher-made tests (particularly in secondary schools) and portfolio and progress assessment (especially in elementary schools), and teacher-designed materials. Different patterns of instruction were found at different instruction levels. Characteristic instructional practices were investigated, including school-community partnerships, professional development and collaboration opportunities, degree of integration of ESL students into the school program, appreciation of linguistic/cultural diversity, design of instructional sequence, and type of classroom strategies used. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

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A Profile of Content-ESL Across the United States

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Washington, DC

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 1994

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A Profile of Content-ESL Across the United States
Dorothy Kauffman
Center for Applied Linguistics

Background

Results of a 1993 independent survey of kindergarten through grade 12 public school enrollments in the United States indicated that the number of students with limited English proficiency increased 68.6% between the academic years of 1985-86 and 1991-92. In 1985-86, there were 1,497,051 of these students; by 1992-93 the number grew to 3,524,592 students, an increase of 1,027,043. During this same period, a total of 12 states reported an increase in enrollment of students with limited English proficiency of 100 percent or more (W-B Olsen, 1994).

These demographic changes have profound implications for educators: classrooms are becoming more multiethnic, multiracial, and multilingual, and teachers and administrators are faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of students who have diverse expectations of schooling and the role of teacher and student, prior schooling experiences, and learning style preferences. These students are often termed "at-risk" because many have low achievement, limited English skills, and high drop-out rates (Carter & Wilson, 1992). They need instructional programs that are sensitive to such factors while maximizing academic achievement. A number of models have been developed; one such model is "content-ESL" or integrated language and content instruction.

In the 1980s, researchers began to recommend integrated language and content instruction to develop language minority students' academic language proficiency and to improve their access to subject matter (Crandall, 1987; Mohan, 1990; Short, 1991). There was substantial anecdotal information about the importance and effectiveness of the approach, but there had been no systematic documentation of the goals, philosophies, objectives, and methodologies of programs and teachers implementing it. Nor had there been any attempt to identify the range of practices included in that term or to identify which practices were most appropriate or effective under which conditions.

In 1991, the U.S. Department of Education, through the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA), contracted with the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) to

conduct a descriptive study of content-ESL practices across the United States. The purpose of this study was to describe content-ESL programs--Who are the students? What languages do they speak? What subjects are taught? Who are the teachers? What instructional strategies and materials do they use?

What is content-ESL?

Content-ESL refers to instructional programs for language minority students in which the teaching of academic content--science, math, social studies--and the teaching of language are integrated. The goal is to improve students' academic achievement and language proficiency simultaneously. Content-ESL lessons therefore have both content objectives and language objectives. In the content classroom, the teachers understand the challenges English language learners may face with both language development and content concepts and thus adjust their instruction to meet the students' needs. In the language classroom, the teachers develop students' language skills through academic content, often organized in thematic units.

The Study

To describe the extent of content-ESL programs across the United States, data were collected in several phases (for more information about the research procedures and statistical findings, see Sheppard, 1994). In the first phase, the research team completed three major tasks. First, they reviewed the relevant literature to discover the theoretical underpinnings for content-ESL, to identify program models, to summarize the major instructional approaches or strategies used to teach content-ESL and sheltered instruction, to describe a sample of materials that draw on academic content as the vehicle for language instruction and other resources available for designing curricula and instruction, to review methods and materials developed to measure learner achievement and evaluate programs, and to capture evolving trends in teacher education. Second, the team designed and field tested the data collection instruments that would be used later in the study, including a series of interview protocols and

a classroom observation checklist. Finally, they located schools with content-ESL programs through a nomination process that involved directors of Title VII (OBEMLA) projects, state departments of education, directors of OBEMLA's regional multifunctional resource centers (MRCs), professional organizations such as Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and the National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE), as well as colleagues. These people were asked to supply the names and addresses of schools that had content-ESL programs. Ultimately, 3,000 programs from all parts of the country were identified and surveyed with a set of questionnaires. The items on the questionnaires addressed such program elements as grade levels and content areas in which content-ESL was taught, the number of students and their native languages, instructional approaches, assessment measures used, the socio-geographic status of the students, and the number and background of teachers involved. Data from 2,992 returned questionnaires were entered into a database.

In the second phase the research team distributed two additional questionnaires, one for administrators and one for teachers, to 1,500 schools. The items on the administrator's questionnaire addressed such elements as program description, the impetus for creating the program, the content-ESL curricula, and the percentage of limited English proficient (LEP) students participating in the reduced-price lunch program (as an indicator of socio-economic status). The items on the teacher's questionnaire addressed such elements as the content areas covered in the program, the prior school experiences of the students, instructional approaches and activities, and language and content modifications. More than 600 completed sets of questionnaires were returned and the data entered into a database.

In the third phase, the research team took an in-depth look at 20 programs in a variety of schools--large inner-city complexes, sprawling suburban schools, and small rural schools. These sites were a microcosm of all the content-ESL programs that had participated in the first survey. As a result, the 20 site schools (nine elementary, four middle, and seven high schools) represented all grade levels, all regions of the country, students from many ethnic and language backgrounds, and a wide range of

subject areas.

The researchers, in teams of two, attended classes--to observe such diverse lessons as a Lakota music and dance class, a demonstration of the effect of winds on flying objects, a science experiment in which students made inferences from indirect observation, and a lesson about Thornton Wilder's Our Town. They also learned other information as well--how one school improved the students' standardized test scores and how one school improved its scholastic reputation in the community. They visited newcomer classes that emphasize reading and writing activities in the students' native languages and later transition them into bilingual and English classes. They heard how programs began and watched as students participated in hands-on science activities involving catapults, microslide viewers, and jars of whipping cream. They listened as bilingual aides interpreted directions. They talked with students and parents who shared stories of how they had come to the U.S. They talked with teachers, principals, and school board members. Via these classroom observations and interviews, they gathered data about content-ESL instructional activities and classroom practices across the U.S. They also conducted a telephone survey of a random sample of public schools in the U.S., to estimate the number of schools that have content-ESL programs. A total of 725 schools were contacted in this survey.

Findings

The Survey Data

Data from the surveys answered the following questions.

1. What is the extent of content-ESL programs across the United States?

* Roughly 15% of all public schools, or somewhere between 12,000 and 13,000 schools, have content-ESL programs.

* Each of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico have content-ESL programs. However, the states with the largest numbers of content-ESL programs are

located in the South and the Southwest.

2. At what grade levels are most programs offered, and who are the students?

* Most schools offer content-ESL classes in grades 1, 2, and 3. About half reported classes in grades 4 and 5. Fewer than half reported classes at the kindergarten level, the pre-K level, or in grades 6-12.

* The majority of the programs (81%) serve students who speak Spanish. Sizeable numbers of programs also serve students whose native language is Vietnamese (33%), Chinese (23%), or Korean (18%). Over 170 native languages are represented, including Afrikaans, Apache, Belorussian, Dutch, Ga, Inupik, Latvian, Nepalese, Swahili, Twi, and Urdu. Forty-nine percent of the programs reported using the students' native languages in the classroom.

* While a wide variety of nationalities and ethnic groups were reported, the five countries of origin with the largest numbers of students were Mexico (19%), Vietnam (9%), the People's Republic of China (5%), Laos (5%), and the United States (5%), i.e., students born in the U.S. from homes in which a language other than English is spoken.

* The majority (77%) of students are from low-income families.

3. Are there curricula designed for the program, and what subjects are taught?

* Most programs offer ESL students instruction in social studies, science, or math. In addition, over 100 types of other subject matter courses are paired with English, including American culture, auto mechanics, ceramics, dance, graphics, horticulture, telecommunications, and photography.

* Over half of the programs use curricula designed specifically for the content-ESL programs; about three-fourths of these programs use materials prepared specifically for them.

4. What assessment instruments are used to measure content achievement and language proficiency?

* The majority of programs use teacher-made tests to measure student progress. In over half the programs, portfolio assessment and/or progress checklists are used.

* Middle and high school teachers are more likely to use teacher-made tests than are elementary school teachers.

* Elementary school teachers are more likely to use portfolio assessment and progress checklists than middle and high school teachers. (For more information about assessment measures used, see Kauffman, 1994, pp.74-82.)

5. What instructional approaches are used?

* Almost all teachers create materials or activities for their content-ESL students.

* All teachers are more likely to rely on textbooks than authentic print materials, though the use of the latter is on the rise.

* Primary school teachers are more likely to use a whole language approach or thematic units than are middle and high school teachers.

* Students in primary grades receive more native language support during instruction than do students at higher grade levels.

* Middle and high school teachers are more likely to use basic skills materials than elementary school teachers.

* Elementary school students spend more time interacting with English-speaking peers during class than do secondary school students. Secondary school students spend more time doing academic tasks requiring reading and writing in English than do elementary school students.

The Site School Data

Data from the 20 site schools answered these questions. (For more information about the site visits see Kauffman, 1994.)

1. What characteristics describe the instructional practices of these content-ESL programs?

* Close partnerships between the school and the community

In some districts, local businesses have formed alliances with the schools. These businesses provide funds for equipment for math, science, and technology classes; send scientists to the schools to perform experiments with teachers who in turn replicate them with students; and provide motivational speakers to schools to talk about their careers, challenges, and successes. In other districts, local

industries fund cultural events and provide scholarships for students.

* Opportunities for professional development and cross-department collaboration

Many schools set aside time for staff development activities and for the ESL and content staff to discuss instructional strategies, curricula, and materials. Programs are offered in collaboration with local colleges and universities to encourage instructional aides to complete certification requirements. Faculty across departments and disciplines collaborate to select, schedule, and plan courses, and to hire staff for the program. Faculty form multidisciplinary departments that share budgets, develop curricula, devise assessment procedures, and engage in team teaching.

* Integration of ESL students into the school program

ESL students are integrated into the all-school program to varying degrees. In some programs they simply take physical education classes with English-speaking students while participating in ESL courses. In some, they are encouraged to join clubs and participate in extracurricular activities. In still others, they are given responsibility and serve as peer helpers for new ESL students who have lower English proficiency or as language models in foreign language classes.

* An appreciation for and support of students' language and cultural diversity

This appreciation is demonstrated through programs such as a grandparents' program, in which tribal elders are invited to school to tell stories and legends; daily routines in which students read aloud texts or student-written essays about their countries, cultural festivals, historical events, and important leaders on the public address system; hallway displays of high quality paintings representing different cultures; school-wide events to honor students' cultural and linguistic diversity, involving the sharing of stories, poetry, music, dance, and food; and incorporation of students' cultural values in daily classroom instruction. In several programs, time is set aside each day for all students to study a second language--nonnative English speakers learn English, and native English speakers learn another language.

* A carefully designed instructional sequence

Newcomer programs offer students instruction in basic English while developing their first and

second language literacy and academic content skills. As students move through the program, they take fewer ESL classes and more sheltered classes, i.e., classes in which emphasis is placed on developing their knowledge in specific subject areas through instruction which is tailored to their levels of English proficiency, until such time as they can take mainstream classes. Instructional programs offer students several levels of courses and allot elective credit for early levels and full English credit for upper levels. Sheltered instruction taught by mainstream teachers is allotted full content credit.

2. What characteristics describe the instructional approaches used by the teachers in these programs?

* These teachers favor the use of progressive instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, hands-on activities, and whole language over more conventional strategies of oral drill or an emphasis on traditional reading and writing activities. Some teachers, however, draw upon conventional strategies in response to students' and parents' expectations of what school should involve.

Conclusions

Content-ESL programs have arisen in response to the educational requirements of a rapidly expending language minority student population. If current predictions are correct, children whose native language is other than English can be expected to enter public schools in larger numbers in the future. This will stimulate the creation of still more content-ESL programs. Growing concern for the quality of U.S. education, high drop-out rates among minority students, and the need for educational standards will further spur their growth.

The picture of content-ESL instruction is emerging as more and more educators find more effective solutions that will enable their students to achieve high levels of English proficiency and acquire academic concepts and skills. Although content-ESL programs vary widely across the U.S., the educators who participated in this study agree that integrated language and content instruction can work and that approaches such as whole language, cooperative learning, thematic units, and hands-on activities are particularly effective with students who are at beginning English proficiency levels.

Content-ESL curricula, materials, and strategies will continue to develop as more content teachers learn how to address nonnative English speaking students' language needs, more ESL teachers learn how to base their instruction on content, and successful teachers everywhere learn how to share their knowledge of these students and effective strategies for teaching them.

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